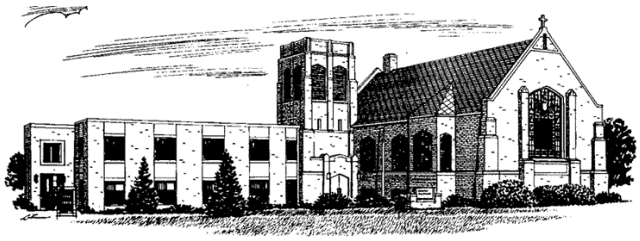


The Rev. Joan Oleson, Pastor
Home: 269-983-2475
Email: *oleson@saronlutheran.org*

Marcus Roll, Senior Choir Director,
Bell Choir Director
Email: roll1mc@gmail.com
Irma Gorman, Organist
Margaret Froehlich, Administrative Assistant
Megan Savage, Financial Secretary
Email: financial@saronlutheran.org
Emily Gaul, Child Care

Typical Sunday Schedule at Saron:
During the School Year:
8:30 & 11:00 A.M. Worship
Childcare provided
9:40 Learning for Ages 2 – Adult

Summers (thru Labor Day weekend):
9:30 Holy Communion
Childcare provided
No Learning Hour

During the present Pandemic:
11:00 a.m. via Zoom

All are welcome!

We hold in prayer:
The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton,
Presiding Bishop, ELCA
The Rev. Dr. Craig Satterlee, Bishop of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, ELCA
The Episcopal Diocese of Western MI

Our Companion Synods:
Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras
Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea
Lutheran Church of Latvia

Saron's Mission:
Joyfully sharing God's love for all!!

SARON NEWSLETTER

Saron Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)
510 Main Street
St. Joseph, Michigan 49085

Website: www.saronlutheran.org
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
Phone: 269-983-1273
Facebook:
www.facebook.com/saronlutheranchurchst.joseph

December 2020

"Watch, Wait, and Wonder" is the theme of our mid-week Advent reflections this year. There has been a lot of that lately, hasn't there. We watch – for election results, the pandemic to be over; we watch peoples and businesses hurting. We wait – for a vaccine, for healing. We wonder – what will things look like when the waiting is done?

Yet our days are filled with another kind of wonder – the watching, the waiting, and the wonder of the celebration of God made flesh, the birth of the Christ child. It is the watching, waiting, and wondering that is filled with hope. It is the wonder of new life, and of a hope that says this one, Emmanuel, God with us, has come to walk with us in our struggles and bring rest, peace, and healing.

Today we live in the tension of what is and what is to come. The tension is real. Hope is "real-er." In the end, we know God is with us already – in the waiting, in the watching, in the wonder.

Our celebrations of Christmas will look different this year, as you might guess. On Christmas Eve, you are invited to join me at Saron's outdoor nativity scene for the reading of the Christmas story, prayer, and listening to "Silent Night." This will happen at both 4 pm and 7 pm. Additionally, or alternatively, you may join me on Zoom for a 10 pm candlelight service. May your watching, waiting, and wondering be filled with joy.

Please note our Advent/Christmas schedule is posted on the cover page of this newsletter.

Pastor Joan

Caring and Sharing

In Our Prayers –

Arla Huelsberg and Richard Schalon are at the Whitcomb Tower Retirement Center, St. Joseph; **Bernice Koski** is at Woodland Terrace.

Office Hours at Saron (these hours will vary during Covid-19)

Margaret (secretary): Mon-Tues, 9 AM - 1 PM
Weds of Newsletter Week, 9 AM - 1 PM
Volunteers: Weds, 9:15 AM - 11 AM (approximately)
Megan Savage(financial secy); Tues & Thurs 5:30 PM
financial@saronlutheran.org

When Pastor is out of town, emergency pastoral care information can be obtained by calling the church office (983.1273) or contacting the president of the congregation.

Note: E-mails meant for Pastor should be addressed to oleson@saronlutheran.org. E-mails to Margaret and the church office should be addressed to info@saronlutheran.org.

Happy Birthday Wishes to Saron's Members in December 2020.

Dec. 2 - Victor Coar
Jason Crockett
Dec. 4 - Phil Standen
Dec. 5 - Alexander Breyen
Dec. 7 - Dana Riley
Lorraine Mikesell
Adam Maly
Dec. 8 - Lee Carter
Dec. 9 – Janet Taylor
Piper Gray-Roll
Dec. 11 - Robert Deaton
Dec. 12 - Cynthia Brown
Edward Brunner
Dec. 13 - Eric Standen
Deborah Standen
Dec. 14 - Finnegan Gray-Roll
Dec. 16 - Charles Pater
Caden Zwar
Dec. 18 - Heather Pudell
Dec. 24 - Bernice Koski (95 years)
Dec. 27 - Oliver Fortenbacher
Dec. 30 - Madison Dipert
Dec. 31 - Kristen Harper

Happy Anniversary Wishes to Saron's Members in December 2020.

Dec. 18 – Dennis and Colleen Lundgren
Dec. 26 – Brian and Marybeth Culverhouse
Dec. 30 - Mark and Judy Wedde

"God's Blessings for a very happy day and year round"

If there is anyone who has been omitted, or, if the dates are incorrect from the birthday and anniversary list, please call the church office at 983-1273. Thank you.

PRAYER GROUP

Please call or email Pastor Joan with your prayer requests at oleson@saronlutheran.org. Thank you.

With Sympathy

We extend our sympathy to the family of Marge Teal, upon her death on Saturday, November 7. Our prayers are with her husband, Bill, as well as their family. Bill and Marge were long time members of Saron before moving to North Carolina.

https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/statesville-nc/margaret-teal-9895085

God is our refuge and strength. Psalm 46:1a

CONGRATULATIONS

We welcome Aurora Stoltenow -Petersen through baptism on November 7. Rory's parents are Dan and Kelsi, and her sister is Ruby. Welcome, child of God! Congratulations to the entire family.

LOOKING AHEAD

Saron's Annual Meeting will be held Sunday, January 24, 2021 after worship. Details to come.

FORTIFY & fly

It's awesome when hope sneaks up on you. The water damaged area in the sanctuary has been patched and painted again. It doesn't matter that we've thought the leak was fixed before and patched that spot and been wrong. It doesn't matter how many times we have to take a step back, reasses and try again. We won't give up just like God will never give up on us. We will make mistakes, need to step back to put in the work, and he'll make us new again. As many times as it takes.

As of the end of October 2020, we had collected $279,136 towards our 3 year pledge total of $371,165. Thank you for sticking with us. We're in this together!

Worship

FACEBOOK

We love to share pictures of Saron's ministry on our Facebook page and we get great feedback. It is our practice not to put names with the pictures. If you have questions, or prefer your picture not to appear, please contact Pastor.

SUNDAY SCRIPTURE READINGS

As you prepare for worship, you are invited to read and reflect on the Scriptures for the day.

Sunday Dec. 6 –
Second Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 40:1-11
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13
2 Peter 3:8-15a
Mark 1:1-8

Sunday Dec. 13 –
Third Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Psalm 126
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Sunday Dec. 20 –
Fourth Sunday of Advent
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Luke 1:46b-55 (52)
or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 (1)
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

Thursday Dec. 24 —
Nativity of Our Lord I — Christmas Eve
Isaiah 9:2-7
Psalm 96
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-20

Friday Dec. 25 —
Nativity of Our Lord lll — Christmas Day
Isaiah 52:7-10
Psalm 98
Hebrews 1:1-4
John 1:1-14

Sunday Dec. 27 —
First Sunday of Christmas
Isaiah 61:10-62:3
Psalm 148
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:22-40

Youth

Are you in grades 6-12? Please join us for youth group activities! For more info, contact Scott at *scottgaspari@outlook.com or (Cell) 847-373-8825.*

LEARNING

Saron is a congregation seeking to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered and sent by the Word.

Tuesday Evening Men's Bible Study

Saron Men's Tuesday Bible Study will be on sabbatical for the Advent season starting November 24, 2020 and will reconvene on January 5, 2021.
"Iron Sharpens Iron and One Person Sharpens the Wits of Another"

Saron Men's Bible Study meets every Tuesday at 6:00 pm using Zoom for communication. If you have any questions, feel free to call or text Bob Kynast at 269-921-2786 or Don Hafer at 269-985-3637.

1ST SUNDAY BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

Our next meeting comes on December 6th, 6:30 p.m. It will be a ZOOM event. The book we chose for discussion is "The Guest Book", by Sarah Blake. The Milton family history is "a saga that illuminates the great divide and the gulf that separates the rich and poor, black and white, Protestant and Jew spanning three generations". (Quote taken from the book jacket.) There is more here than you might expect. Lots to discuss pertaining to our times and events today. ZOOM sign-on information will be sent to all who have Expressed interest in our reading group. If you would like to beadded to the list, please contact Kathy Cowall (269) 428-0354 or kcowall@hotmail.com.

We do not meet in January. This year we decided that allows us time to read two books for our February 14th gathering: "The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek" by Kim Richardson and "The Giver of Stars" by Jojo Moyes. Each book gives a slightly different fictional/factual account of the dedicated Kentucky Pack Horse library service of the 1930's. Watch for more information on this in the January newsletter.

If you love to read books and enjoy talking about them, we'd love to have you join the discussions.
All are welcome. "Reading one book is like eating one potato chip." (Diane Duane)

THURSDAY MORNING WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

The Thursday morning Bible Class will not meet during the month of December. We begin again on January 7.

Men's monthly Bible Devotions and Breakfast

We will meet via Zoom at 9 a.m. on Saturday, Dec. 5. Contact Dennis Lundgren for more information or watch Your e-mail for details.

Time to Renew "Living Lutheran" Magazine

"Living Lutheran," the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, keeps us informed of events and issues impacting Lutherans. Subscribers also have access online to more than 9,000 archived articles and 400 study guides. Those that have been enjoying "Living Lutheran" this past year or those who would like to begin receiving "Living Lutheran" will be able to purchase or renew for the price of $9.00 for the year.

Please make out a check to Saron and write "Living Lutheran" in the memo area. You can mail it to the church or drop off through the mail slot. We want to get all of the subscriptions in as soon as possible so there will be no lapse in current subscriptions.

Women of the ELCA.

SARON CHURCH WOMEN

Deborah Circle will **not** meet in December**.**

SARON CHURCH WOMEN

Saron Church Women will not be having the usual bake sale during December. The idea of conducting a bake sale will be revisited next Spring, 2021.

Hospitality

Watch for more news as we get closer to getting back together in the building.

Outreach

BENTON HARBOR SOUP KITCHEN

On October 22, with a lot of precautions, Don & Carol Hafer and Dave & Kathie Bradley prepared 120 sack lunches to be distributed at the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen.

To keep everyone healthy the lunch, which includes a sandwich, chips, an apple, dessert & water, and a warm greeting are not served inside the but are given to the clients by the Soup Kitchen employees at the entrance.

This has become the new "norm" this year for lunches instead of the

ham dinner that we previously prepared and served in the dining room.

If you feel comfortable helping prepare the lunch please contact Kathie Bradley (269-921-4665]. At this time we are not baking cookies to be included with the lunches. During this pandemic it is even more important to continue Saron's mission of *Joyfully sharing God's love for all!*

Thank you to all who continue to support this ministry with your time, contributions, & prayers.

After the church building opens **large cans of fruit will be needed at the Soup Kitchen** & can be dropped off anytime at the church. Any questions or to volunteer or provide cookies at a later date please contact Kathie Bradley at 269-921-4665.

INCLUSIVITY TASK FORCE

Thank you to all who joined in the conversations that will help in the discernment of becoming a more intentionally inclusive community of faith. These discussions are ongoing. Watch for more! They will help us discern the possibility of becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation. For more information see the website at reconcilingworks.org or contact one of the task force members. Here is their contact information.

Laurel Gacek 269/470-6062
mlmg2445@sbcglobal.net
Laura Hicks 517/930-0579
lhicks42@gmail.com
Darlene Kiessel 269/313-4062
kiessel@me.com
Diane Madej (Open Hearts. Open Church, N/WLM Synod) 231/670-0328
dianemadej234@gmail.com
Pastor Joan Oleson 269/983-1273
oleson@saronlutheran.org

Here is Saron's proposed Welcome Statement, as affirmed by the council. It will begin our discussion. *"As a community of faith* who joyfully shares God's love for all*, we believe our lives and faith are strengthened by diversity. We strive to be a community who welcomes people of every ability, age, citizenship status, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, marital status, political perspective, race, and sexual orientation. Whatever life's circumstance, we openly welcome and value you. We celebrate God's unconditional love and respond joyfully to your presence here. All are welcome. You are welcome."*

DID YOU KNOW?

Some things are happening at Saron that some of us haven't heard about – because of COVID, so much doesn't get communicated through our normal channels – including our usual chit chat after worship. So here's a couple of things that took place recently.

Sometime during the summer, members of the Education Committee made up gift packages for our young people who normally attend Vacation Bible School. The packages contained 5 days worth of activities and crafts such as the children would have done in person at VBS. Plus, the boxes reminded the kids that we are always thinking of them. Committee members delivered the boxes to the childrens' homes. We appreciate the Education Committee for this creative response to a summer of isolation, and those members of the Committee who put it all together and delivered the boxes.

In October, another group of volunteers delivered care packages to all of the Saron members (that we knew about – hope we found everybody we found 34 of them) who are health care workers, educators, and church staff. We all know these three groups of people have been working under very stressful conditions as they learn new ways for doing their jobs, staying safe, and keeping those they take care of stay safe while receiving treatment or learning or worshiping in a very different environment. A big thank you to all those people on the front lines, and a big thank you to the package preparers and deliverers. Contents for the gift bags were purchased with a Thrivent Action Grant.

Support

Tax Incentives during the Covid-19 Pandemic

"Above-the-line" tax deduction for charitable contributions

The federal government recently passed legislation to provide financial relief to families as a result of Covid-19. As part of the CARES Act, for the purpose of increasing the work of charitable organizations, individual taxpayers will receive new tax incentives for making charitable donations. The provision encourages individuals to contribute to religious, charitable, and educational organizations by creating a new "above-the-line" deduction (i.e. for taxpayers who take the standard deduction). This deduction permits deduction of up to $300 of annual monetary contributions.

This is applicable for tax years beginning after 2019, and does not sunset after 2020. A related provision increases the limitations on deductions for charitable contributions by individuals who do itemize. For those individuals, the 50% of adjusted gross income limitation is suspended for cash contributions made in 2020.

For members over 72 years old drawing income from an IRA, the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) is waived for 2020, thereby reducing your tax burden.

Effective January 1, 2020, the CARES Act waived RMDs for defined contribution 401(k) plans, 403(b) plans, governmental 457(b) plans, and IRAs for calendar year 2020. The waiver applies to RMDs to be made in 2020 and to 2019 RMDs that were due by April 1, 2020 (if not already made in 2019). The good news is that Qualified Charitable Distributions can still be made directly from an IRA account to the church that will both benefit our ministry and reduce the member's taxable income. As always, members are advised to check with their tax advisor for the latest information and interpretations before filing.

STOCK DONATIONS

Saron partners with TD Ameritrade, a brokerage firm, to accept stock donations. If you would like to donate stock, email Joe Ulrey to receive more information. Thanks! Joe Ulrey josephulrey@yahoo.com

ELCA GOOD GIFTS

Goats and piglets and chicks, oh my!

At this time in past years, we're accustomed to seeing the little Christmas tree in the Narthex decorated with colorful ornaments depicting farm animals that are so vital to the survival of families around the globe. Unfortunately, this year we won't be in the Narthex at the beginning of Advent, but we can still support ELCA Good Gifts. Your donation for an ornament allows the ELCA to purchase and deliver the animal of your choice to where it will do the most good. To keep it simple this year, we are offering a choice of only four animal ornaments.

Goat – $50
Goats can go where other animals can't, surviving in some of the world's most challenging terrain.
Goat's milk provides nutrition for children and goats are quick to reproduce.

Piglet – $30
This little piggy couldn't be a bigger lifesaver. This gift provides natural fertilizer that helps crops grow tall and strong.

Honeybees – $20
Support farmers and healthy honeybee colonies with this buzz-worthy gift. Honeybees provide honey to eat, beeswax that allows a farmer to start a small business, and a boost to crop growth by pollinating plants everywhere they go.

Chicks – $10
Help a family spread their wings. Eggs not only provide an ongoing supply of protein-rich meals – they can also help start a small business and generate a steady source of income.

Here's how it will work this year:

- Look for an order form in the bulletin each week during Advent.
- Fill out the order form and return it, along with your payment, by mailing to the church or dropping in the office mail slot.
- We will send you your ornament(s) by return mail, or if you are in a rush to get it (them), we can probably drop it (them) off at your house.
- Once all the Good Gifts donations are collected, we will send them to ELCA and your animals will be on their way to a new home!

As members of the ELCA, we believe that God is calling us into the world – together. And with generous, loving hands, we can make a difference. ELCA Good Gifts is your opportunity to provide critical support to the ministries and programs that mean the most to you and the people you love. – Saron Outreach

Decorating Committee Update – November 2020

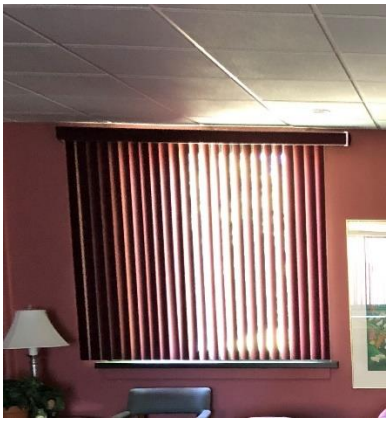
Although the church building has been closed to Sunday services, meetings and access by the public since mid-March 2020 (gasp! 8 months so far), Saron's Decorating Committee has been diligently plugging away with remodeling goals and repairs after 2 episodes of water damage on the 2nd level/lounge and office spaces. We have only good news to report. Approximately half of the decorating budget derives from a generous bequest from the estate of a non-member who identified the need to replace old carpeting and half from the Memorial Fund where gifts have been accumulating over recent years. The repairs caused by water damage is being covered by the Maintenance and Repair budget line item and probably some insurance reimbursement.

The Decorating Committee proposal was approved at Saron's Annual Congregational Meeting held January 26, 2020. The remodeling projects already completed include the painting of all rooms on the 2nd floor by Saron volunteer Amanda Bradley. She has done a most professional transformation of space that was last painted and updated over 30 years ago. The old vertical blinds have been removed and replaced with roller shades (Budget Blinds) that will filter out harsh sunlight while still allowing people to see the outdoors. TV screens used to play videos or computer programs can now be viewed without being pulled into dark corners. New carpeting has just been ordered along with a small addition of vinyl wood flooring that will be installed in very limited areas. Migala Rug & Carpets hopes to do the installation over the Christmas/New Year holidays. The kitchenette in the lounge has been completely updated with a new countertop and purchase of cabinets (Hannapel's) to be installed above the existing counter and lower cabinets which have been painted. Bob Deaton and Brad Frey are thanked for their ideas and assistance. The old and inefficient can lights in the section of the lounge where furniture is located have been replaced with an increased number of LED can lights. We can now see written materials without flashlights! Some new furniture has been selected but not ordered at the present time.

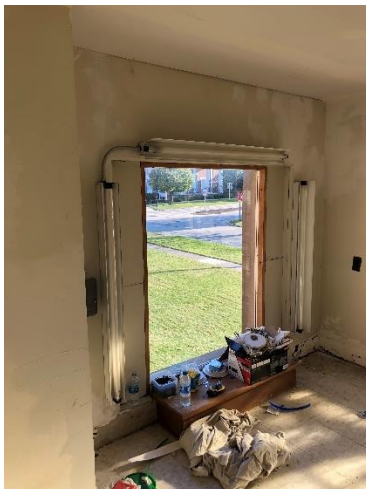
In the spring we experienced water damage from plugged drains in the roof over the Sunday School wing. Suffering the most damage was Marcus Roll's Music Room – a small room that is up a few steps from the office level and is also the location of the "Jesus statue" that is lit up at night and visible from Main Street. Prior to water pouring all over Marcus's stored materials, the extremely unattractive concrete ceiling had been potted with drill holes from the new roof that was installed last year over the Sunday School wing. We took that opportunity to remove everything (volunteers Marcus Roll, Dave Bradley, Keith Stevens, Tyler Cook, Connor Ashley and Matt, Mia and Alaina Bradley), throw away a lot of accumulated papers, install a dropped ceiling with beautiful can lights and drywall all the walls for an up-to-date look. Marcus has selected new shelving and storage items for all our music needs in the future, Amanda will be painting the room and vinyl wood flooring will be installed. Keith Stevens has taken the statue home to clean and restore after years of standing behind glass in full sun.

As anyone who has experienced remodeling can testify, the entire area is in a state of upheaval and it is probably for the best that church services are not being conducted! Because the unknowns of the Pandemic may prevent Saron from gathering together during the upcoming holidays and into the New Year, the committee wanted to share its excitement and enthusiasm for the new look that will await you all! And we want to extend a huge "thank you" to the volunteers who are helping to keep our costs down!

The Decorating Committee: Karen Johnson, Kathie Bradley, Pastor Joan Oleson



Outdoor Eucharist – November 2020



Fall Cleanup Day

Thank you to all who participated!

SARON LUTHERAN CHURCH
510 MAIN STREET
ST. JOSEPH, MI 49085

Website: www.saronlutheran.org
Email:info@saronlutheran.org

A Congregation of:
The North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

December 2020

Midweek Advent Worship
"Watch, Wait, and Wonder"
Wednesdays, December 2, 9, 16, and 23
7 pm via Zoom

Children's Program
Sunday, December 13 during Zoom Worship

Christmas Eve
Thursday, December 24
4 pm and 7 pm
An outside gathering around the Nativity Scene with the reading of the Christmas Gospel, prayer, listening to Silent Night

10 pm
Candlelight Worship via Zoom

Christmas Day
Friday, December 25
9:30 a.m. via Zoom

December 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	**2** 11:00a.m. Virtual Coffee Via Zoom Advent worship 7 pm via Zoom	**3**	**4**	**5** 7:00 p.m. Church Council Meeting by Via Zoom
6 Worship at 11:00 a.m. Via Zoom Confirmation 9:30 Via Zoom Sunday School 10:10 via Zoom 6:30 p.m. 1St Sunday Book Group Via Zoom	**7** 11:00 a.m. Prayer Time (in homes)	**8**	**9** 11:00a.m. Virtual Coffee Via Zoom Advent worship 7 pm via Zoom	**10**	**11**	**12**
13 Children's Program during Zoom Worship	**14** 11:00 a.m. Prayer Time (in homes) 6:00 p.m. Support Comm. Via Zoom Newsletter Articles due	**15**	**16** 11:00a.m. Virtual Coffee Via Zoom Advent worship 7 pm via Zoom	**17**	**18**	**19**
20 Worship at 11:00 a.m. Via Zoom	**21** 11:00 a.m. Prayer Time (in homes) 7:00 p.m. Church Council Meeting by Via Zoom	**22**	**23** 11:00a.m. Virtual Coffee Via Zoom Advent worship 7 pm via Zoom	**24 Christmas Eve,** 4 pm and 7 pm An outside gathering around the Nativity Scene **10pm worship via zoom**	**25 Christmas Day** 9:30 a.m. via Zoom	**26** Pastor on vacation----
27 Worship at 11:00 a.m. Via Zoom ----------	**28** 11:00 a.m. Prayer Time (in homes) ----------	**29** ----------	**30 NO** 11:00a.m. Virtual Coffee Via Zoom ----------]	**31**		

IF YOU ARE NOT RECEIVING ZOOM INVITATIONS AND WOULD LIKE TO, PLEASE CONTACT PASTOR JOAN AT oleson@saronlutheran.org.